



Yada Yada Yada

## **Bald and bold, a young woman learns to find beauty where it really lives**

---



When Julia Crittendon started losing her hair five years ago at the age of 28, she thought she was dying.

She was tested for Lupus, blood diseases and other conditions, but each one came back negative. Then she was finally diagnosed with alopecia areata, a highly unpredictable, autoimmune skin disease that causes hair loss on the scalp and elsewhere on the body. In alopecia areata, the affected hair follicles are mistakenly attacked by a person's own immune system. This disease affects more than 5 million people in the United States.

Though relieved she wasn't facing a more serious illness, Crittendon was nevertheless devastated. She was losing something that for her represented beauty and femininity. At first she could strategically style her hair in a way to cover her bald spots. After losing more hair she turned to headbands and even hair weaves. Eventually she moved on to wigs.

Then this spring Crittendon did something she never thought she'd have the courage to do. She shaved her head completely bald, slipped a flower behind her ear and told the world, "Take me as I am."

Crittendon has accepted her condition as a blessing in disguise. She now says that losing her hair actually helped her gain a self-confidence she never knew before.

"My self-esteem was so low even with hair," said Crittendon, now 33. "I didn't know who I was until I lost my hair."

Crittendon said that losing her hair forced her to try to discover the beauty she held inside.

"I started to really notice all the things that I was about, who Julia is, what Julia likes, not what everybody else likes," she said.

Along the way her husband, former Eastern Kentucky University basketball player Dwayne Crittendon, let her know he was her biggest fan, constantly reminding her he loved her for her witty humor and go-getter personality, not her hair.

Crittendon said she figured, "If I am everything my husband says and everything that I've discovered about myself, then it's going to be okay for me to cut my hair off and walk around and not hide it under a wig."

To step out into the world bald, beautiful and bold, Crittendon said she had to decide that she would no longer allow society and the media to define beauty for her.

"Beauty is accepting self," she said.

To support other women dealing with hair loss due to alopecia areata, other diseases or cancer treatments, Crittendon has launched BBiBBY, which stands for "Bold beauty is being beautifully you." Through her website, [www.bbobby.org](http://www.bbobby.org), she hopes women will find the information and support that they need to feel confident and strong.

Crittendon is also working on a documentary called "What Is Normal?" that will tell the stories of women dealing with hair loss and seeks to educate the public about alopecia areata.

Her wish, however, is that her story will inspire all women to love and accept themselves. Her message is simple: "Start defining yourself."

For more information on alopecia areata, visit [www.naaf.org](http://www.naaf.org). Women interested in participating in Crittendon's documentary should e-mail her at [info@bbobby.org](mailto:info@bbobby.org).

*Javacia N. Harris, 26, writes about the issues that keep us up at night. Tell her what's on your mind at [jharris@velocityweekly.com](mailto:jharris@velocityweekly.com).*